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SUBJECT: OSCE SUPPORT FOR AFGHAN ELECTIONS

¶1. (U) This is an action request. Please see paragraph 11.

¶2. (SBU) Summary and Action Request: USOSCE has encouraged the OSCE's Office of Democratic and Human Rights (ODIHR) to respond positively to Afghanistan's request for OSCE assistance to its August 20 presidential and provincial council elections by sending an election assessment team. The evaluation by ODIHR, universally respected for its election expertise, could lend legitimacy to these elections, help Afghanistan prepare for next year's parliamentary elections, and solidify OSCE's partnership with Afghanistan, a bordering OSCE Partner state that has a considerable impact on security in the OSCE region. ODIHR, the OSCE Chairmanship, and the majority of OSCE participating States stand ready to assist Afghanistan, but require firm assurance that adequate funding and security for an assessment team would be forthcoming before taking the necessary political decision on the matter. Previous ODIHR missions to Afghanistan have cost approximately one million Euros, including security costs. Action Request: please provide assurances re level of funding US would be ready to contribute to this effort, as well as security aspects the OSCE would be expected to provide for an ODIHR team in Afghanistan (and conversely security that the international community will be providing in support of the election effort). End Summary.

¶3. (SBU) Afghan Foreign Minister Spanta in a February 22 letter to the Greek Foreign Minister and Chairperson-in-Office Dora Bakoyannis requested the OSCE's Office of Democracy and Human Rights (ODIHR) assist in the preparation and planning of the August 20 Presidential and Provincial Council Election. Spanta had earlier invited the ODIHR in his speech to the OSCE-Partners for Cooperation Conference, held in Kabul last November, expressing appreciation for ODIHR's key role in assisting the 2004 Presidential and 2005 Parliamentary elections. The Afghan Mission to the OSCE followed up on March 17 by providing the OSCE Secretary General with the Afghan Independent Election Commission's wish-list of training and equipment needs (distributed to EUR/RPM and SCA/A).

¶4. (SBU) ODIHR is well placed to assist the Afghan elections given its expertise in election administration and its experience in Afghanistan. ODIHR's assistance to Afghanistan's first-ever Presidential elections in 2004 and in the parliamentary election of 2005 was applauded by the Afghan Government and the international community. For the 2004 and 2005 election, ODIHR sent expert election support teams who analyzed key elements of the election environment, including the electoral system, campaign and legislation, the electoral administration, voter registration, counting and vote tabulation, and the complaints and appeals process. The resulting recommendations from ODIHR have since been used in preparing for the 2009 election. ODIHR invited Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission (IEC) to ODIHR's offices in Warsaw on March 10-11 to review the recommendations. ODIHR's

assessment report from the 2009 Presidential election would be extremely valuable in preparing for next year's parliamentary elections in Afghanistan.

¶15. (SBU) Given the EU and UN's technical assistance, ODIHR is not expected to play as prominent a role in this election as it did in 2004 and 2005. ODIHR Director Lenarcic reported to the March 19 Permanent Council meeting that ODIHR was ready and willing to help. At our urging, Lenarcic and his team have been in contact with the UN, EU, and governmental and non-governmental actors in Afghanistan to identify ongoing technical assistance activities and identify where ODIHR expertise could be most useful to avoid unnecessary duplication and add value. The Greek OSCE Chairmanship has joined us in encouraging ODIHR to formulate a robust technical assistance package.

¶16. (SBU) An ODIHR mission to Afghanistan will require a consensus-based, political decision of the OSCE Permanent Council. The OSCE Chairmanship will distribute a draft decision the week of March 23 -- based largely on our input -- authorizing ODIHR to provide assistance in the election. The decision should be brought to the Permanent Council in the next month in order for ODIHR to have adequate time to prepare and deploy its experts.

Stumbling Blocks: Funding and Security

¶17. (SBU) The majority of the OSCE participating States believe that ODIHR's expertise and professionalism should be made available to Afghanistan, whose fate greatly matters to security in the OSCE area. To achieve consensus on a decision in the Permanent Council, however, we will need to address the concerns of some of the participating States regarding security provisions for the ODIHR experts and adequate funding for the mission.

¶18. (SBU) ODIHR Director Lenarcic has estimated that a mission could cost a million Euros or more. The 2004 and 2005 election support teams, which were much more robust, cost more than one million Euros. Participating States want assurances from us and other probable donors -- including Finland and Sweden -- that funding would be forthcoming. (Note: the OSCE already has 303,500 Euros in available U.S.-sourced funding left over from the previous Afghan election projects. This funding can immediately be made available for the 2009 Afghan elections. End note.)

¶19. (SBU) While the precise security parameters of the assessment mission cannot be specified at this point (ODIHR can only determine what specific role it can play after the EU concludes its needs assessment mission in April), the overall mission is expected to include at least 10-15 experts based in Kabul for up to six weeks leading up to the election. ODIHR would prefer to be co-located with the EU mission so that it can tap into the EU observer reports. The ODIHR experts would conduct meetings in Kabul with election stakeholders (political parties, election officials, NGO's, media representatives, etc.) and would require secure transport to and from the meeting venues.

¶10. (SBU) Incorporating ODIHR experts under an existing security umbrella -- such as the possible ISAF security to be provided for the EU observers -- would be the ideal solution. NATO/ISAF's ability to provide security for the ODIHR team would calm fears about sending ODIHR experts into a potentially dangerous situation.

¶11. (SBU) ACTION REQUEST: USOSCE requests firm assurances that can be conveyed to OSCE participating States that funding resources to support an ODIHR team will be available and what steps, if any, the U.S. might be ready to arrange or provide for the security of the ODIHR team on the ground during their entire stay in Afghanistan.

SCOTT